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ABSTRACT

To determine the effects, if any, that one-parent families have on reading achievement, a study compared the 1983 California Achievement Reading Test scores of children in grades two through four who were from one-parent families, with scores of those from two-parent families. Twelve children were used in each group. Total reading scores were converted into scores that showed the difference between chronological age and (test score) grade equivalent. Results indicated that the mean score of the one-parent family students was higher than that of the children in two-parent family situations. (Appended is a literature review of related research on the effects of disrupted families on children's behavior and achievement.) (HOD)

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A COMPARISON OF READING SCORES OF CHILDREN FROM ONE-PARENT AND TWO-PARENT FAMILIES

By

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ABSTRACT

A comparison of the reading scores was made between children from one-parent and two-parent families, in order to determine the effects, if any, that one-parent families have on reading achievement. Children in grades two through four were included. The test scores used were the 1983 California Achievement Tests. Results indicated that the students from one-parent families did significantly better in reading achievement.

It was reported in 1979 by the Bureau of the Census that 19% of U.S. families were maintained by one parent. Each year these figures increase, with more than one million marriages per year ending in divorce. By 1990, it is estimated that 50% of the children in the U.S. will live with one parent. (Glick, 1979) The changes that are occurring in the structure of the family have caused a new avenue to be looked at in the education of children from these homes.

The majority of single parent families are caused by separation and divorce. Young children experience divorce like the death of their parent. About 1/3 of the individuals loose all contacts with their father. Often they are given no prior notice to this occurrence and face the loss of their parent with absolutely no preparation. This makes recovery of the situation even more difficult.

Childrens' reactions to divorce vary, depending on their age. Adolescents are least able to express their feelings about divorce, while children aged 9 - 11 are better able to express themselves and their feelings of anger about the situation. In a study done by Ryker, Rogers and Beujard (1971) it was found that ages six through ten were the critical years for family disintegration. These are the years when a child is receiving a strong foundation in his/her education, but due to family disruption attention to schoolwork is shoved aside. Insecurity, guilt, disruption, and isolation are only a few of the elements these children are forced to cope with.

Single-parents are faced with the task of helping their children adapt to their new living situation. After the divorce, continued turmoil exists, both emotional and physical. Often, the economic level of

the family changes, surroundings are uprooted, employment changes occur, and the children must endure the loss of one parent. It must be recognized that these children do exist as a family unit, though it differs from some others.

Single-parents may need help in adjusting and learning to deal with their new family situation. Educators and administrators must take a close look at the increasing figures presented on single parent children. We must examine their needs and understand special attention may be required for them. Often unrealistic school expectations are placed upon single-parents and/or students. For example, conferences are scheduled at the convenience of the teacher rather than the parent assignments are made based on the assumption of a two-parent family, and assignments are made requiring parental guidance. The term "broken-home" is often attached to dtudents from single-parent families. A steretype of a troublemaker, neglected, or undisciplined child is placed with these children.

On the contrary, teachers can make a valuable contribution to the child's understanding of marital break-ups, divorce, or separation. A variety of programs, strategies and inventions presently exist to help all involved in the education of single-parent children. In California, a Peer Counseling Program was developed, which is held for students of one-parent homes as well as students from two-parent homes who are interested about divorce, separation, death, etc. An inservice program for teachers and administrators was developed by Drake in 1979. It includes four sessions which provide facts and information regarding the effects of divorce and separation on children, and activities to plan interventions for the children of these families. Wallerstein and Kelly

(1977) developed a Divorce Specifics Assessment Test. It is used to determine capacities and strengths of a child in his/her environment. Based upon test results, types of interventions are planned.

The single-parent family poses complex situations for school districts nation wide. It is a problem which is becoming more and more evident, as indicated by the figures stated earlier. If we work to adapt strategies, programs, and recommendations for both parents and students, perhaps the single-parent family syndrome will rise to a majority, and subside as a problem.

HYPOTHESIS

There will be no significant difference in the reading test scores of children from single-parent families and children from two-parent families in grades 2 - 4.

DEFINITIONS

Single-parent families - families in which one parent lives at home. This may be a result of death, divorce, separation, or unwed mothers.

Two-parent families - families in which both parents live at home.

California Achievement Test - a standardized test administered in the Spring of 1983. It measures the vocabulary and comprehension skills of each student.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. The test scores used were valid evaluations of the child's reading level.
2. The socio-economic status of the child has remained stable.
3. The family data found about the students was correct.

LIMITATIONS

1. The number of students that were used in this study was small.
2. The test scores were taken from the Spring 1983 California Achievement Test situation where a different administrator was assigned to each classroom.

DELIMITATIONS

The study has been conducted in one school district and therefore cannot be extended to other populations.

SAMPLE AND PROCEDURES

Twelve one-parent students were identified in the Glen Ridge Schools in grades two through four. This sample consisted of five boys and seven girls.

For the control group, an equal number of boys and girls from two-parent families were selected as a purposive sample to match the grade, sex, age and IQ scores of experimental sample.

An analysis was then made of the reading achievement of the samples on the California Achievement Test administered in April, 1983. The total reading score was utilized in the comparison to determine whether any significant difference between the sample means existed.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A comparison was made between the 1983 California Achievement Test scores of children from one-parent families and those from two-parent families. A total of twelve children were used in each group, which included second, third and fourth graders. The Total Reading Scores were converted into scores which showed the difference between chronological age and (test score) grade equivalent. This data appears in the appendix. A summary of the statistical result using these scores are shown in Table I.

TABLE I

SUMMARY OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN C.A. AND TOTAL RDG SCORES

	Mean	S.D.	Var.	t
One-Parent Students	1.48	.952	.906	2.9*
Two-Parent Students	.283	.428	.183	

*Significant < .01.

These results indicate that the mean score of the one-parent family students was higher than that of the children in two-parent family situations. The t comparing the differences between the mean achievement of the students was found to be significantly below the .01 level.

The Total Reading Scores were also compared, and similiar results were found. A summary of these is shown in Table II.

TABLE II

SUMMARY OF TOTAL READING SCORES

	Mean	S.D.	Var.	t
One-Parent	4.24	1.56	2.44	3.08*
Two-Parent	2.90	.944	.892	

*Significant < .01

As can be seen, the difference between the means was over one grade equivalent (1.34) in favor of children from one-parent families.

In order to determine at what grade level the widest difference existed, the Total Reading Scores for each grade level were compared. The results appear in Table III.

TABLE III

SUMMARY OF TOTAL READING SCORES ACCORDING TO GRADE LEVEL

	One-Parent		Two-Parent		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	T-Score
Grade Two	2.2	.15	2.15	.1	.176
Grade Three	5.3	.663	2.6	.59	3.71
Grade Four	5.15	.869	4.1	.35	1.449

The widest difference in the mean scores is at the third grade level. The t of 3.71 at that level is significant at .01. Although there is a one year difference in the mean scores of the fourth graders, the t is not significant.

CONCLUSIONS

After reviewing the results of this study it can be concluded that the children from single-parent homes achieved significantly higher scores than those from two parent homes. The groups were compared according to their total reading score on the California Achievement Test and also by the Difference between their chronological age and the grade equivalent on the test taken; both comparisons showed the same results.

Further study should include a larger number of students and the sample studied over a longer period of time. The results, now indicating no negative effects of a home environment with one-parent family, might be subject to change in time.

DISRUPTED FAMILY: EFFECTS ON CHILDREN
RELATED RESEARCH

Research on the effects on children from disrupted families began as early as 1954. Fathers who were away from their families because of involvement in the armed forces reported a sense of alienation from their children. They frequently reported a greater sense of estrangement toward their sons, rather than daughters.

Since the 1950's, family disruption has become a more serious problem. Disruption is due to divorce, separation, parental death, and desertion, causing 19% of the children under 18 years of age to live in a one-parent situation. The figure represents approximately eleven million children, who will be prone to psychological damage, social delinquency, and academic failure.

Single-parent homes (father-absent) were cited by Monahan & Toby (1957) as a major factor in delinquency. A relationship between father availability and crime amounts amongst juveniles was evidenced in forty-eight societies studied by Bacon, Child, and Barry (1963).

Standards of moral judgement were compared in a study done by Hoffmann (1970). Seventh-grade white children from single-parent families (father-absent) were contrasted with father-present children. The father-absent boys were found to evaluate acts according to the probability of punishment, rather than the social responsibility of the act. Their teachers rated them as more aggressive, less willing to conform, and unwilling to accept blame for their behavior. However, no differences were found between father-absent girls and father-present girls.

According to a study conducted by Jacobson (1978), children from one-parent families exhibit a higher degree of maladaptive behavior than children from two-parent families. The specific areas of behavior studied

were Conduct Disorders, and Socialized Delinquency.

Children exhibited different types of behavior, depending on the cause of disruption in their family, as reported by Felner, Stolberg and Cowen (1975). Those who had experienced the death of their parent were timid, shy and exhibited heightened withdrawal, while children of divorce and separation showed aggressive behavior and acted out more frequently. The death of a parent causes children to react in a variety of ways. In research done by Fredlund (1977) older children had become sad and withdrawn, while others were more boisterous and disruptive than they had been. The preschoolers experienced regression, and a refusal of trying something new.

In a study done by Kelly and Wallerstein, which began in 1970, 131 children from sixty divorcing families in Northern California were seen by a counseling service, after initial parental separation. Information from the child and parents was obtained, such as pre-divorce history, child's responses, and parent-child relationship. One year later a follow-up was conducted on these children. The research separated the children into two groups; seven and eight year olds in one group and the nine and ten year olds in another. When the experiences reported by the children were compiled, though each was different, common characteristics were found among them. The most striking response was their prevailing sadness and grief. The children found great difficulty in finding relief from it. During the interview sessions with the children, many were found to use extensive avoidance and silence. Others suffered severe anxiety and fear as a response to the divorce. The conclusions of the study yielded the following figures: (a) 50% had improved psychologically since the first visit, (b) 15% had consolidated difficulties which were

initially seen, (c) 23% had a worsened psychological condition than when they were initially seen, (d) 12% were not seen for the follow-up session.

Teacher perceptions of behavior problems in children living in one-parent situations, or with stepparents, and those in two-parent families were examined in a study by Touliatos and Lindholm (1980). The subjects were 3,644 white children in grades K - 8 attending a suburban school in Houston, Texas. Of these, 2,991 lived with both parents, 355 with one-parent, 298 with one parent and a stepparent. Teachers provided background information and Quay's Behavior Problems Checklist ratings (1975). The behavior checklist is separated into five divisions: Conduct Problems, Personality Problems, Inadequacy-Immaturity, Socialized Delinquency, and Psychotic Signs. The overall results indicated that children living with one parent had significantly more problems than those from two-parent or stepparent families, on all checklist variables. Children living with stepfathers and natural mothers exhibited more Conduct Problems and Socialized Delinquency than did students from two-parent families. The children living with stepmothers and natural fathers showed more Conduct Problems than those living with both parents.

In 1980, Frank Brown researched eleven elementary schools across nine states and four high schools across three states, in order to determine the differences in the school needs of children from one-parent families and those from two-parent families. Behavior problems and achievement were examined in the study. The results indicated a low number of children from one-parent families in the high achievement group and a disproportionately high number in the low achievement group. One-parent children represented a higher amount of behavior problems than two-parent children in the following areas: tardiness,

truancy, expulsion, suspension, and dropouts.

The results of the studies cited on behavioral differences are generally consistent in that a greater degree of maladjustment is shown in children from one-parent families than those living in a two-parent situation. Children with a greater degree of behavior problems are very likely candidates for academic failure as well. Considerable research examining the academic progress of one-parent children has been done.

The first research done to find the relationship between cognitive performance and single-parent family status was in 1930. Sutherland studied Scottish children, ages 11 to 13. He found that two-parent children had significantly higher IQ scores than single-parent children. In 1964, the same results were found by Brown in a similar study, using fifth and sixth graders. Crescimbeni (1965) found father-absent elementary school children had scored significantly lower on a standardized achievement test than the two-parent children in the group.

In 1968, a study done by Sutton-Smith, Rosenberg, and Landy compared father-absent effect in families of different sibling composition, as reflected in subjects' scores on the American College Entrance Examination (ACE). The ACE is a test of certain intellectual abilities, not an intelligence test. It consists of six tests of linguistic and quantitative abilities. A sample of nineteen year old students from Bowling Green State University was used. There were not socioeconomic differences between sexes or any mixture of the groups. The scores on the tests were converted to standard scores, and used in analysis of the study. The conclusions showed dramatic differences for the father-absent subjects. Regardless of the length of time the father was away, the ACE scores were lower. The males whose fathers were absent during their

early childhood years (age 0-9) had lower scores than those absent in childhood ages 0 through 4. ACE scores for father-absent females during ages zero through nine were lower than those with absent fathers during ages zero through ten years or older. Comparisons of other factors such as family size, sibling sex-status, and sex differences were made.

In a similar study, it was found by Deutsch and Brown (1964) that father absent first and fifth graders scored significantly lower than father present children on the Lorge Thorndike Intelligence Test. The fifth graders performed more poorly than the first graders, while the blacks scored significantly lower than the whites. No information was provided as to when the father had left the family situation.

Further study by John W. Santrock, in 1972, analyzed father-absence by onset and type. Third and sixth grade achievement scores were compared. First, the students filled out questionnaires about their fathers. It was kept quite simple, asking if a father was present in the home. If they responded no, they were asked when he left, and the reason for his absence. The accuracy of the information given was verified, and the sample was selected. There were 286 father-absent children and 57 father-present children, all of which were white, lower class boys and girls. The results were as follows: (a) Father-absent boys and girls scored lower than the father-present children, on the third grade achievement test, (b) Boys whose fathers were gone due to divorce, separation, or desertion during the ages 0 - 2 scored lower than father-present boys, in third grade, (c) Girls whose fathers became absent at their 10-11 year age period scored higher than girls in their 12-13 year age period whose fathers had become absent, (d) Children whose fathers died when they were at ages zero through two scored higher on third and

early childhood years (age 0-9) had lower scores than those absent in childhood ages 0 through 4. ACE scores for father-absent females during ages zero through nine were lower than those with absent fathers during ages zero through ten years or older. Comparisons of other factors such as family size, sibling sex-status, and sex differences were made.

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sixth grade achievement than when their fathers died in the six to nine age period, (e) Father absent boys scored significantly lower on cognitive measures than father-absent girls.

Blanchard and Bitler (1970) studied effects of early (before age 5) versus late father absence. He included the availability of the father, with low availability being less than six hours weekly. He found the students in the high availability homes scored higher classroom grades and achievement test scores than any of the other groups.

Riker, Rogers and Beaujard (1971) did research on the achievement of students from disrupted families. Variables included sex, age and income differences, reasons for the father's absence and the number of people per rooms in the house. They found children who had lost their parent due to death had an easier time rationalizing their loss than those students of divorced parents. The children from one-parent families a more negative self-concept than two-parent children. Low income families had children with lower intelligence levels, lower verbal skills and lower school achievement. The higher achievement levels for the students from higher income families is related to their housing condition. Families of lower income often have overcrowded conditions, causing a higher noise level and inadequate study space. It was found that the critical years for a child to experience a disruption to their family was between the ages of six and ten.

Although most research in this field clearly defines a significant difference in behavior and achievement of one-parent children, there have been more positive findings in a few studies. Jonathan Wohl (1962) conducted a study to determine the school achievement of elementary school children who had been in a mother-only home for a major part, if not all

of their school years. Thirty students were given a self-concept battery and the California Test of Personality. They were also given the California Achievement Test. The results showed no significant differences in achievement scores between one and two-parent children. There were no differences between the number of parents in the home and the personal and social adjustment scores.

In 1981, Kathryn Black conducted a study to assess the affects of parental absence on intellectual functioning. Scholastic Aptitude Test scores were gathered from 130 single parent students, and a matched group from two-parent families. No significant differences were found in any aspect of S.A.T. performance.

Our society continues to undergo family changes and will do so in the future. Educators need to be aware of these changes and adapt to them. If we are to continue to prepare students for their future, first we must be sure to prepare ourselves.

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APPENDIX

ONE-PARENT STUDENTS

TOTAL READING SCORE	DIFFERENCE FROM C.A.
2.2	.5
2.5	.8
2.2	.5
2.2	.5
5.2	2.5
5.8	2.9
4.4	1.7
5.8	2.6
4.5	.8
5.9	2.2
4.3	.6
5.9	2.2

TWO-PARENT STUDIES

2.0	.3
2.2	.5
2.2	.5
2.2	.5
2.6	-.1
2.1	-.6
2.5	-.2
3.5	.8
3.7	0
4.5	.8
4.3	.6
4.0	.3